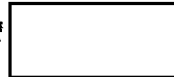


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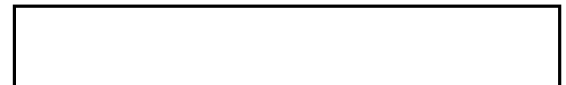
26 February 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR: Representatives of USIB Members

SUBJECT: SNLE 11-10-62: PROBABLE SOVIET REACTIONS TO A U-2 OVERFLIGHT

1. The attached draft estimate is forwarded for review.
2. The meeting to discuss this draft has been scheduled for 1400 hours in Room 7E62 (Reference Room) at Langley on 26 February 1962. Copies of the text will also be available at the meeting.

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CHESTER L. COOPER  
Deputy Assistant Director  
National Estimates

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

26 February 1962

SUBJECT: SNIE 11-10-62: PROBABLE SOVIET REACTIONS TO A U-2 OVERFLIGHT

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Soviet reactions to a U-2 flight over the ICBM impact area on Kamchatka during the next several months.

ASSUMPTION

The USSR would detect and track such a flight.

CONCLUSIONS

( To come )

THE ESTIMATE

Military Countermeasures

1. We believe that the USSR would not carry out its announced threat to attack immediately the bases involved in any U-2 overflights of Soviet territory. If the flight were successful, the Soviets would almost certainly

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reinforce, as rapidly as possible, the air defenses of the penetrated area and of other areas which they regarded as likely subsequent targets.

#### General Soviet Reactions

2. With respect to US military intentions, the Soviets almost certainly would recognize the strategic intelligence purposes of the flight. Thus they would not consider it an indication of probable Western attack in the near future. They would probably conclude that, since the US knew that it was deliberately reviving an acrimonious issue in Soviet-American relations, the flight demonstrated the high priority which the US attaches to military preparedness. Taken by itself, however, the penetration almost certainly would not persuade them that the US had made any crucial changes in its general military strategy, e.g. was giving great weight to a first strike.

3. In political terms, however, we believe that the flight would have very great meaning. The Soviet leaders are extremely sensitive to penetrations of Soviet air space. This sensitivity is at its highest in the case of the U-2 aircraft, in view of the events of May 1960. Further, they consider that they have a commitment from the President not to resume such flights. Thus the Soviets would probably feel it necessary to make a reassessment of the political intentions of the present US Administration.

4. Present Soviet policy toward the US, as is frequently the case, is a mixture of "soft" and "hard" tactics. Gromyko's unyielding position in his conversations with Ambassador Thompson and challenges to Allied air access to West Berlin are accompanied by moves in the direction of detente, e.g. the

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Powers-Abel exchange, the exemption of the President from criticism in Soviet propaganda, and the feelers and invitations to members of the Administration to visit the USSR. This tactical mixture is intended, we believe, to keep the West under pressure to make concessions on the Berlin question but, at the same time, to retain enough options and room for maneuver to enable the USSR to avert an unwanted showdown. Additionally, it probably reflects Soviet desires to refute Chinese charges of softness, plus the contradictory desire to compose relations with the West while a crisis impends in relations with Peiping.

5. A U-2 penetration, in this political atmosphere, would almost certainly cause the Soviets to drop some of the detente aspects in their policy. They would probably conclude that the US, if it were unwilling to forego U-2 flights at such a time, was also not prepared to cooperate in other measures to reduce tensions. Khrushchev would almost certainly drop his idea of a visit to the USSR by the President, if not of his own volition, then because his colleagues would regard such a project as ignominious in the aftermath of the penetration. His stress on negotiations and on personal contacts with Western leaders might result in serious recriminations in the Presidium, and these features of the "peaceful coexistence" strategy would probably have to be dropped for some time. It would be argued that, unless the USSR responded aggressively, more flights would probably follow, and the US leaders would consider the Soviets to be weak.

6. These reactions would not, in our view, override the careful calculations of limited risk and limited gain which have thus far governed the USSR's approach to the Berlin problem. But the flight would tend to

persuade the Soviets that Western concessions on Berlin were highly unlikely, and that the time for unilateral action, with the risks controlled as well as possible, had arrived. At a minimum, the desire to present a "hard" front to the US would have the effect of narrowing Soviet freedom to temporize on this issue.

7. In other political circumstances, Soviet reactions and their consequences might be quite different. The flight might occur, for example, at a time when the present tentative aspect of Soviet policy had already given way to a course of determined unilateral action with respect to Berlin. With tensions already high on this account, the Soviets might interpret the penetration as one evidence of US determination to defend its interests vigorously; if the West were simultaneously displaying great firmness on matters directly related to Berlin, the flight would probably give the Soviets added pause.

#### The Question of Publicity

8. If the flight were successful, the USSR almost certainly would not publicize it. Most important, it would be highly sensitive to any advertisement of its military vulnerability. Further, the Soviets would probably calculate that, since world condemnation of the Powers flight had failed to deter this one, publicity alone would be insufficient to prevent further repetitions. Finally, publicity would bring the Soviets face-to-face with their earlier threat of missile retaliation against the U-2 base. In order to deter additional flights, Khrushchev might make a strong private protest to the President, warning that respect for air sovereignty was a precondition of further US-Soviet relations in all fields.

9. Quite different considerations would be involved if the USSR brought down the plane and could convincingly demonstrate this with physical proof. In this case, the Soviets would see great advantages in exposure as a means of demonstrating Soviet military prowess, damaging the US international position and the prestige of the President, stimulating doubts about the capacity and judgment of the US as leader of the free world, and straining America's relations with its allies.

10. An intermediate set of circumstances is also possible: the USSR might succeed in knocking down the aircraft but be unable to produce physical proof. This might occur if plane and pilot came down at sea and the Soviets were unable to recover them. In these circumstances, we think that the Soviets would behave in the same fashion as <sup>if</sup> the flight had succeeded. This is a probability, however, and not a certainty, because the Soviets would fear that in these circumstances knowledge of the incident might leak out from non-Soviet sources.

11. Despite the arguments for publicity in circumstances where the Soviets acquired physical proof, the experience of May 1960 must have taught the Soviets that the course they chose at that time also has substantial disadvantages. Khrushchev clearly was embarrassed by the affair and had difficulty in justifying his prior cultivation of the "spirit of Camp David," and especially his attributions of good intentions to the US President. Further, the Soviets found that vigorous exploitation of the U-2 affair was incompatible with any simultaneous attempts at negotiations with the West. Finally, the affair seemed to justify Chinese charges that Soviet policy was based on a misjudgment of "imperialist" intentions and

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that Peiping's prescriptions of unremitting hostility toward the West were not only doctrinally sound but also realistic.

12. All these factors retain some of their relevance in 1962. Khrushchev's public attitude toward President Kennedy, while more reserved than his approach to President Eisenhower, is still positive enough so that public exposure of a U-2 penetration would once again raise doubts about the correctness of his appraisal; at the same time, we believe that his position within the Soviet leadership is not quite as strong as it was immediately before May 1960. Soviet policy is not free of the necessity to defend against Chinese attacks, and the USSR would recognize that, if it publicized the penetration, it would probably have to adopt a highly anti-Western line to undercut renewed criticisms from Peiping. Lastly, in May 1960 the imminent end of President Eisenhower's term of office provided the Soviets with a tolerable pretext for refraining from action on Berlin while it broke off contacts with the US. A similar pretext would not be available in the present instance, and exploitation of the incident would set up strong pressures on the Soviets for unilateral Communist action on the Berlin problem, especially as they have lately been warning of such action if progress was not made in the stalemated negotiations.

13. A further factor in the Soviet decision would be the possibility, if the U-2 came down in Soviet territory, that knowledge of the incident would become fairly widespread. Within the USSR, the chances of such knowledge spreading beyond top party and military levels plus a small number of local military personnel would depend upon circumstances which cannot be foreseen. These chances are probably quite small in the isolated,

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sparsely populated Kamchatka area. But it cannot be excluded that an additional factor impelling the Soviet leaders to publicize the incident would be concern over the possible spread of rumors that the USSR had downed a U-2 but was unwilling to announce it. They would also be concerned that information or rumors might originate outside the Bloc.

14. In sum, we believe that, in the present political situation, if the USSR could prove that it had shot down a U-2, the Soviet leaders would face a complicated decision. They would recognize that, if they chose to exploit the affair, they could expect great political dividends, but also that this campaign would set the tone for their tactics on other issues for a considerable period. As of today, the Soviets do not appear anxious to make such a turning. We cannot be sure whether, at the time of a U-2 penetration, developments in East-West relations, and particularly in the Berlin question, taken together with the flight itself, would have created the conditions which would recommend this sort of turning to them. It is possible that they would choose to remain publicly silent, calculating that their success against the penetration would effectively deter future flights. On balance, however, we think it somewhat more likely that they would launch an all-out campaign of exploitation. This would probably mean that they would simultaneously make a more farreaching decision to intensify East-West tensions generally and also to undertake unilateral moves in Berlin.

#### Consequences of Soviet Exploitation

15. Exposure by the USSR, and the concomitant hardening of Soviet tactics across the board, might serve for a time to arrest the deterioration of



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Sino-Soviet relations. We believe, however, that it would not lead to a fundamental reconciliation, since substantial differences in political outlook would remain and, more important, divergences in the national interests of the two and their competing claims to authority over the international movement would be largely unaffected.

16. If the Soviets publicized a U-2 failure over their territory, non-Communist reactions would in general be highly adverse. The US would be widely condemned for the subsequent major increase in international tensions. Few elements of Free World opinion would believe that the requirements for reconnaissance justified these consequences. The number of Western statesmen privately expressing approval to the US government would probably be smaller than in May 1960, since some of them would believe that the consequences of the Powers affair ought to have enjoined the US to greater caution.

17. The intensity of these reactions, however, might vary somewhat according to the general political climate into which the affair intruded. If exposure occurred at a time when Berlin and other East-West issues were relatively quiescent, anger at the US for disrupting this atmosphere and doubts about American judgment would be extremely strong. On the other hand, these reactions would probably be mitigated somewhat, though by no means cancelled out, if it had previously become clear that the USSR was embarked on major forward moves in Berlin or elsewhere.